

# Cutting education a risky proposition for state



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The state of Kentucky has the second highest poverty rate in the country, places 46th in household income and 45th for per capita gross domestic product.

These are not flattering statistics. These low marks may have to do with the fact that Kentucky is 48th in the nation in the number of college graduates, which can be explained by the fact that we rank 41st in education expenditure.

In fact, the latter are the reasons for the earlier unflattering statistics, and the reasons for the higher education reform

act of 1997.

Considering this, my dear governor, how exactly will it help to cut the higher education budget? When it is clear that the only way to help the state out of poverty is actually raising the higher education budget 8 to 10 percent, as the Council on Postsecondary Education recommended?

I know the state has budget problems, but cutting funding for education is an extremely shortsighted way to face them. States such as New Jersey, New York and California, which rank higher in income levels and lower in poverty rates have done so, not by cutting down the education budget, but by raising it.

If we wanted a governor to cut our budget for education

and other social programs, we would have elected a Republican.

Clearly, lowering the education budget will result in hiring freezes, reducing part-time faculty, increasing class size, delaying or suspending pay raises for established faculty and staff, reducing or cutting extracurricular activities that help learning, as well as other interactive approaches to increase the quality of teaching.

How are we going to meet the goals of the reform act of 1997 and solve the problems of poverty by doing this?

Recently, Michael McCall, president of the Kentucky Community and Technical College System, sent a letter to all the faculty and staff about the need to cut \$6.8 million from

the current year budget. This drop in expenses will dramatically hurt the poor majority of the state.

Kentucky has the 11th highest tuition among community colleges in the country, so any further tuition increase is simply too much for the overburdened poor.

School tuitions have been steadily rising countrywide for the last few years. This trend will only be worse with the cutting of higher education. The University of Kentucky is considering tuition increases in the double digits for fall 2008.

The country, as a whole, is going through a credit crunch, and educational loan scandals that make life more difficult, and deter poor students from getting educational loans and

other financial help.

All these elements team up against people of lower and middle incomes, making it a difficult luxury to afford the public education needed to move up on the salary scale.

In fact, the reduction of the education budget in the state is a good reason to raise the budget of KCTCS, since technical and community colleges will be taking a lot of those students who can no longer afford tuition in four-year institutions.

We will need more resources to hire new professors, expand facilities and upgrade equipment.

McCall's grotesquely oversized \$610,000 compensation package has been under scrutiny recently. Some people justify it due to his good adminis-

tration. This is an opportunity for McCall to really show his administrative skills by presenting a solid case not to cut the budget.

I am aware that Gov. Steve Beshear has a lot of plans for helping to fund state operations with money from casino gambling. Perhaps he expects to get the \$420 million that education needs from the casino revenues.

We cannot depend on gambling to fund our education system. The future of higher education is not something to gamble for, much less something to gamble with.

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